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**If You're Thinking
About Reporting
Child Abuse . . .**

. . . Don't

Just

Think!

More than 2,800 incidents of suspected child abuse are being reported annually to the Illinois Department of Children and Family Services. This number is steadily increasing. The episodes involve beatings, sexual assaults, fractures, burns, severe malnutrition, poisoning, and sometimes combinations of abuses. Many of the victims are infants or are too young to defend themselves against the abuser. Some of the youngsters die.

In 1975, Illinois adopted a new Abused and Neglected Child Reporting Act which strengthened the state's program to prevent and control child abuse. Sexual abuse and mental injury were added to the definition of child abuse. The maximum age of children protected by the law was raised from 16 to 18. Physicians were granted authority to retain a child in protective custody while the Department investigates a suspected abuse incident. Perhaps the most sweeping change in the law was the granting of legal immunity to all citizens who report suspected abuse incidents to the Department. Previously, only certain professionals were granted this protection.

Every citizen should recognize a moral obligation to report any situation hazardous to children. By knowing the answers to the questions contained in this folder—and acting promptly—you could save a child's life.

WHAT IS CHILD ABUSE?

Under Illinois law, it is “any physical injury, sexual abuse or mental injury inflicted on a child other than by accidental means by a person responsible for the child’s health or welfare.” “Child” means any person up to 18 years of age.

WHO SHOULD REPORT SUSPECTED ABUSE OR NEGLECT?

Any concerned person can report suspected abuse or neglect to the nearest office of the Department of Children and Family Services. The law *requires* that the following persons report to the Department: physicians, surgeons, dentists, osteopaths, chiropractors, podiatrists, Christian Science practitioners, coroners, school teachers, school administrators, truant officers, social workers, social services administrators, registered nurses, licensed practical nurses, directors or staff assistants of a nursery school or child day care center, law enforcement officers, or field personnel of the Illinois Department of Public Aid.

HOW SHOULD I REPORT?

If abuse or neglect is suspected, you must notify the nearest office of the Department of Children and Family Services *immediately* either by phone or in person.

WHAT DO I REPORT?

Oral and written reports should include the names and addresses of the child and his parents or other persons having his custody; the child’s age, the nature of the child’s

condition, including any evidence of previous injuries or disabilities and any other information that the reporter believes might be helpful in establishing the cause of such physical abuse, malnutrition, neglect or injury and the identity of the perpetrator. By law, written reports must be made within 24 hours after determination of suspected child abuse is made. There are no legal requirements as to the form of the report. Reporting forms are available from Department offices, but the report may be just a letter stating essential facts of the case.

SHOULD THE POLICE BE CALLED?

You *must* notify the Department of Children and Family Services. You may, if you wish, also file a report with the local law enforcement agency. If you notify the police, the law requires you to inform the Department of that action. The police can be contacted for assistance in all instances.

HOW AM I PROTECTED?

Any person, institution, or agency reporting suspected abuse or neglect under the law is presumed to be acting in good faith and is immune from any legal action, civil or criminal, that a parent or other person could conceivably initiate.

WILL I HAVE TO TESTIFY IN COURT?

That depends largely on the nature and severity of the case, whether court action is initiated to remove the child from the home, whether

the abuser is prosecuted on a criminal charge, etc. But remember, you should never be reluctant to “get involved” when a child’s well-being is at stake.

WHAT HAPPENS TO THE CHILD?

The law requires the Department of Children and Family Services to investigate cases of child abuse, neglect or injury reported under the Act and to offer protective social services to prevent further abuses to the child, to safeguard his welfare, and to preserve and stabilize family life wherever possible. If removal of the child from his home is deemed necessary, the Department will petition the court for custody and will then place the child in a foster home or suitable child care institution. Meanwhile, the Department will seek to work with the parents to prepare them for the time when the child may be safely returned to his home. If a physician retains a child in protective custody, he must notify the Department of Children and Family Services immediately. The Department will then initiate court proceedings for custody.

For Further Information
Write:

Illinois Department of Children
and Family Services
Office of Community Relations
524 South Second Street
Springfield, Illinois 62706

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